

Haleemah as-Sa`diyah: the Foster Mother of the Prophet (sallallahu alayhi wa sallam)

A Custom of the Arabs

Breast-feeding of babies by women who are not their biological mothers and allowing such babies to grow up in the deserts are some of the signs of nobility and high status among the Arabs of pre-Islamic times.

Haleemah (radhiAllahu anha) came to Makkah, in the company of some women from the clan of Banu Sa`d, hoping to find babies to nurse. Each woman except Haleemah succeeded in getting a nursling.

Haleemah said: "There was no woman among us who was not offered the Messenger of Allah (sallahu alayhi wa sallam) and, as soon as she was told that he was an orphan, she would reject him. We would say, 'What is his mother going to give us?' For, we only expected to be paid from the baby's father. By Allah, each of my companions was able to get a nursling except me. But when I did not succeed in getting any for myself, I told my husband, Harith ibn Abdul-Uzza, 'By Allah, I would not like to be the only one from among my companions who would go back home without a nursling. I am going to take that orphan boy.'

My husband said, 'You can go and take him. Perhaps, Allah will bless us through him.' I went and took the boy. By Allah, I only took him because I could not find any other."

A Blessed Child

Haleemah continued: "As soon as I took him and brought him to my riding animal, I breast-fed him as much as Allah would permit and he drank until he was filled. His brother also drank until he was full. My husband then went to our old camel and milked her and both of us drank: until we were filled. And we passed a good night.

In the morning, my husband told me, "Haleemah, by Allah, I could see that you have accepted a blessed child. Can't you observe the blessings we have been witnessing since we took him, and Allah continued to increase us in blessing?!"

We set out on the return journey back to our village. By Allah, my donkey was so fast that none of those of my companions could catch up with her. Surprised at this, they said, "Oh Haleemah! Was this not your donkey on which you set out with us?!" I said, "Yes, by Allah, she is!" They then said, "By Allah, there is something about her!"

When we arrived at the land of Banu Sa`d and before that, I did not know a land more barren than our land - my sheep would graze and then come home satisfied and full of milk. We would milk as we liked, and none of our neighbors could be able to have even a drop of milk from their own sheep.

Their sheep would go out grazing and would come home with empty stomachs. They would then tell their shepherds, "You should consider where the sheep graze." Yet their sheep would come back with empty stomachs while mine would come home satisfied, and we would milk as we liked. So, Allah continued to

show us the blessings that we could clearly perceive.

A Very Special Boy

The boy, Muhammad (sallallahu alayhi wa sallam) then reached age two and he had been growing up in a way different from that of other kids. By Allah, he had hardly reached the age of two that he had already had a strong body. We took him back to his mother, though we were sad that we would be losing the blessings he had brought to our household.

When his mother saw him, we told her, "Please let your son stay with us for another year. For, we fear for him the epidemic of Makkah."

We continued pleading with her until she released him to us.

A Visitation From the Angels

Two or three months after we brought him back, an incidence occurred. He and his foster brother were in the back-yard with our sheep when his brother hurriedly came to us and said: "My Qurayshi brother was visited by two men, clad in white garments.

They laid him on his back and opened up his belly."

His stepfather and I rushed to him. We found him standing while his color has changed. His father embraced him and said: "My son, what happened to you?" He said, "Two men in white garment came to me. They laid me down and opened my belly. They removed something out and took it away. They then returned it as it was." We took him back home.

His father said: "Haleemah, I fear that my son has been touched by (the Jinn). So, let us take him back to his family before what we fear can appear."

Haleemah continued:

"So we took him to his mother. When she saw us, she exclaimed, 'What brought you back, foster parents?! You had been taking an excellent care of him! , We said, 'By Allah, nothing has happened. It is only that Allah has helped us pay our debts and we fear that some harm or unforeseen things might happen to him. That is why we brought him back.'

But his mother did not believe us. She insisted that we tell her the truth and when we told her what had happened, she said, 'So you fear that he might be possessed by Satan?! No, by Allah! Satan will never be able to find his way to him. By Allah, there is something great about this son of mine. Shall I tell you something about him?' We said, 'Yes.' She said, 'When I was pregnant with him, I never felt carrying anything that was lighter than him. I saw it in my dream that a light came out of me that illuminated the palaces of Syria. And when I gave birth to him, his delivery was different from that of other babies; he came out, supporting himself with both hands and raising his head up to the heaven. So, leave him alone.'"

Thus did Lady Haleemah (radhiAllahu anha) separate from her great foster son. The Messenger of Allah (salallahu alayhi wa sallam) later in his life, talked about this unique childhood in which he extraordinarily understood the great events and incidents while he was at the village of Banu Sa`d. A number of his Companions may Allah be pleased with them - narrated the events of this childhood.